

Black Bear Damage and Nuisance Complaints 2003

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Abstract

Wildlife Services (WS) personnel received 1,370 bear complaints during calendar year 2003, and trapped and translocated 546 bears. There were also 23 additional bears trapped in cooperation with a research project with the WDNR. The majority of complaints were resolved over the phone with advice and recommendations from a nuisance wildlife specialist located at the Rhinelander District Office. Complaints requiring field investigation or trapping were dispatched to the field. Bears captured were translocated to an isolated area.

Methods

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services took over Wisconsin's bear damage/nuisance abatement work in 1990. WS specialists are located in Brule, Hayward, Rhinelander, Cumberland, Park Falls, Winter, and Florence and are supervised by Bob Willging (WS District Supervisor, Rhinelander District). WS Specialists supervised by Dan Hirschert (WS Acting District Supervisor, Waupun) handled complaints that occurred in the WS Southern District based in Waupun. A full-time nuisance wildlife specialist handled complaints coming in on the Rhinelander and Waupun District's 800 number.

A nuisance bear was defined as any bear causing problems at bird feeders, garbage cans, dumpsters, and/or campgrounds. Damage bears were defined as bears causing problems to agricultural crops, beehives, livestock, or property (e.g. house siding). Every effort was made to handle bear damage/nuisance complaints over the phone with advice and recommendations. When necessary, the nuisance specialist dispatched calls to field personnel for further investigation and/or live-trapping and translocation.

Results

Calendar year 2003 marked the thirteenth year that WS has assisted WDNR with bear damage/nuisance abatement. Bear complaints in 2003 (1,370) were up 5% from 2002 (1,298), and 5% less than the record number of complaints (1,439) received in 1995. The majority of the complaints (80%) were nuisance complaints, 9% involved property damage, and 11% involved damage to agriculture. In addition to the 1,370 bear complaints received, there were 35 instances where WS provided technical assistance for bear damage to agriculture to 69 participants statewide in the WDACP counties administered by WS. This assistance included issuing temporary fencing and enrolling the farmer/grower in the WDACP program.

WS personnel live-trapped and translocated 546 bears during 2003 (Table 1). Almost half (47%) of the bears trapped and translocated were involved in agriculture damage situations, although these accounted for only 11% of the total complaints. As in previous years, bears seemed to congregate at certain corn fields requiring the removal of several bears from a single field in order to reduce damage.

A total of 242 bears were trapped and moved from nuisance situations, and 48 from property damage complaint situations. Bear traps were set in 22% of nuisance complaint situations, while 78% were handled with advice and recommendations. The 800# phone system for

handling complaints again proved invaluable as nearly all of the nuisance complaints came in on the toll-free line.

During 2003, WS specialists ear-tagged 68 new bears and recaptured 5 bears ear-tagged in 1995-2002. None of these were recaptured in subsequent damage/nuisance complaints in 2003. Translocation appeared to be an effective means for handling bear damage/nuisance complaints.

No bears were killed on Agricultural Damage Bear Permits in 2003. The agreement between the WDNR and WS for handling bear complaints continued to work extremely well.

Table 1. *Number of black bears trapped and translocated by county and type, 2003.*

County	Agriculture	Property	Nuisance	Total
Ashland	1	2	15	18
Barron	0	0	4	4
Bayfield	70	4	36	110
Burnett	1	1	1	3
Chippewa	1	0	0	1
Clark	1	0	2	3
Douglas	11	8	22	41
Eau Claire	1	0	1	2
Florence	44	0	8	52
Forest	0	0	7	7
Iron	0	1	2	3
Jackson	1	0	0	1
Langlade	25	1	6	32
Lincoln	2	2	1	5
Marathon	4	0	3	7
Marinette	0	7	25	32
Oconto	0	0	6	6
Oneida	0	4	12	16
Polk	0	1	0	1
Portage	0	1	0	1
Price	2	6	8	16
Rusk	7	4	17	28
Sawyer	62	5	41	108
Taylor	0	1	1	2
Vilas	1	0	15	16
Washburn	22	0	9	31
Total	256	48	242	546